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# Town Meeting

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BULLETIN OF AMERICA'S TOWN MEETING OF THE AIR

BROADCAST BY STATIONS OF THE AMERICAN BROADCASTING CO.



## Should We Accept the New Fashions for Women?

*Moderator*, GEORGE V. DENNY, JR.

### *Speakers*

FIRA BENENSON

LOIS LONG

CONSTANCE BENNETT

GILBERT ADRIAN

(See also page 13)

### COMING

—September 30, 1947—

## On What Basis Can Our Differences With Russia Be Resolved?

Published by THE TOWN HALL, Inc., New York 18, N.Y.

VOLUME 13, NUMBER 22



\$4.50 A YEAR: 10c A COPY



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The account of the meeting reported in this Bulletin was transcribed from recordings made of the actual broadcast and represents the exact content of the meeting as nearly as such mechanism permits. The publishers and printer are not responsible for the statements of the speakers or the points of view presented.

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## THE BROADCAST OF SEPTEMBER 30:

### "On What Basis Can Our Differences With Russia Be Resolved?"



The Broadcast of September 23, 1947, originated in the McFarlin Memorial Auditorium of Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, from 8:30 to 9:30 p.m., EDT, over the American Broadcasting Co. Network.

Town Meeting is published by The Town Hall, Inc., Town Meeting Publication Office: 400 S. Front St., Columbus 15, Ohio. **Send Subscriptions and single copy orders to Town Hall, 123 West 43rd St., New York 18, N.Y.** Subscription price, \$4.50 a year, 10c a copy. Entered as second-class matter, May 9, 1942, at the Post Office at Columbus, Ohio, under the Act of March 3, 1879.

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GEORGE V. DENNY, JR., MODERATOR



SEPTEMBER 23, 1947

VOL. 13, No. 22

## Should We Accept the New Fashions for Women?

### Announcer:

The City of Dallas is proud to welcome the first origination in the State of Texas of the Nation's most popular radio forum, America's Town Meeting of the Air. Station WFAA and the special Town Meeting Host Committee, headed by Mr. Elmer Scott, and other officers of the Dallas Civic Federation, are the hosts for tonight's meeting here in the McFarlin Memorial Auditorium on the campus of Southern Methodist University.

Deep in the heart of Texas, Dallas is one of the most progressive cities in the South. It's one of the most important business centers in the South, and is extremely style-conscious. The citizens of Dallas, like all Texans, are proud of their beautiful women, and they see to it that their women are well-dressed.

Dallas, is, therefore, an extremely appropriate place for tonight's Town Meeting to originate.

This city is agog with discussions about the new look—the length and style of women's skirts, whether there should be pads in shoulders or hips, and whether to buy or not to buy.

Here to preside over our discussion is our moderator, the president of Town Hall, New York, and founder of America's Town Meeting of the Air, Mr. George V. Denny, Jr. Mr. Denny. (*Applause.*)

### Moderator Denny:

Good evening, neighbors. Your Town Meeting is interested in this subject because what women wear costs more than eleven billion dollars annually, and constitutes the third largest industry in the country. We are also interested because you, our listeners, are trying to make up your minds about whether you'll accept the new fashions in whole, in part, or not at all.

It was here at Dallas that a re-



volt against the new look was started, but it was also a leading department store here in Dallas, Neiman - Marcus, that recently made an award to Christian Dior, for outstanding service to the clothing industry. Monsieur Dior is one of the French designers chiefly responsible for the creation of the new look.

But the revolution is not confined to Dallas, as it has become front-page news all over the country, and nearly every American family is furiously engaged in discussing the new fashions for women.

One of the principal supporters of the new fashions, although she has her own ideas about how they should be adapted to American needs, is Fira Benenson, American designer for Bonwit-Teller in New York City.

The most outstanding spokesman on the other side is Adrian of Hollywood, creator of the padded shoulder and the slim hip-line. We are fortunate in having both of these celebrated designers here with us tonight.

But as this battle is not confined to designers alone, we also have the well-known fashion editor of the *New Yorker* magazine, Miss Lois Long, who supports Miss Benenson's views, and the celebrated star of screen and radio, Miss Constance Bennett, who's been voted among the best-dressed women of America several years.

So, let's hear first what the authorities think. First, from the highly successful Fira Benenson of Bonwit-Teller, New York, who ranks as one of America's top designers. Miss Benenson. (Applause.)

### Miss Benenson:

Mr. Denny, you can't imagine how pleased I am that we're discussing this subject on American Town Meeting of the Air. Because of this controversy over fashion, the greatest ambition of every woman is fulfilled. The meetings at last, are interested, and are participating as never before what women wear.

To me, the question is purely academic. The new fashions are here and they are here to stay until the time comes when they inevitably change again. It is only a question of time when every woman will accept the new trend.

Today, thousand of women are already wearing the new style. Every woman is so completely aware of them, that when she greets an acquaintance, her eyes automatically sweep the other woman's hemline before the familiar "Darling, how are you?"

Dressmakers are absolutely buried under discarded shoulder pads and skirts to be made longer. I'm often asked, "Can a fashion be forced on women?" or "Can the fashion magazines dictate what women will wear, or is it maybe

conspiracy of designing merchants."

Don't you for a minute believe it. When a new style catches on, as this one has, it is because the women themselves are ready for it. They are tired of the way they look in their old clothes. The new fashions look wonderful to them and they want them. Once started, no one can stop them any more than one can stop a tide.

Drastic fashion changes have always occurred just before or after a war, because fashion mirrors its own times. The Napoleonic War, the Civil War, the First World War, each carried in its wake a fashion revolution.

Just before the last war, women began to take on many of man's responsibilities, and she carried them through the war. Psychologically, it helped to have big, strong-looking, masculine shoulders, superimposed upon her own slender ones, and she accepted short skirts and a military look for this reason.

Now the war is over. The men are home and women want to be as alluring and feminine as possible. How does a man feel putting his arms around a woman whose shoulders are like a football player's?

The change in clothes would have come gradually if government restrictions had not frozen the silhouette into something that looked like a short, narrow tube

with a box top. Without those restrictions, the present fashions would have evolved quite gradually, minus all this hue and cry.

The very fact that the subject is a matter of debate tonight is significant. If it were an unacceptable fashion, it would not have provoked even a telephone conversation. It would have died at birth.

It is natural that a change in style needs a moment to find its footing, but I have full confidence in the American woman's discrimination and good taste. She will maintain a proper balance.

Do you remember protests after the First World War and how people thought women were going to perdition because of their short skirts and the fact that they bobbed their hair? Can we be in danger again? Are we headed for ruin because our skirts are coming down?

Critics of the new fashion say the influence is continental. What is wrong with that? Must we accept the short, narrow skirt and the bulky shoulder as the American national costume. If American fashions were not sensitive to influence, we might still be wearing the Pilgrim's clothes.

Since the days of the Crusaders, people have adapted ideas from other countries to enrich their homes, their literature, and their clothes. For example, California has influenced the sports clothes



of Europe, and, in turn, the South Seas has influenced California. There is no place for isolationism in fashion. Ideas and styles know no boundaries.

Is it wise in the light of economic conditions to make these changes? Is it ever unwise to stimulate an industry, particularly the third largest industry in the country? Millions of people are employed by it, and they, in turn, speed the circulation of money and encourage prosperity.

Of course, the new dresses are expensive, but not because they are new styles. Everything we buy has gone up in price, and clothing is no exception, but the increase in price is no greater in the clothing field than in any other.

The new styles are a challenge to the American woman's imagination and ingenuity to bring her clothes up to date, and that can be done without great expense. She can lengthen her hemline, pull in her waist, and resort to many tricks to look fashionable. To me, this is a beautiful fashion. It's exciting and romantic, and only those who like to live in the past would ever attempt to stop it. *(Applause.)*

**Moderator Denny:**

Thank you, Fira Benenson. Now, let's hear the other side of the case from a man who has helped to set fashions for women, both on and off the screen, Gilbert

Adrian of Hollywood. Mr. Adrian *(Applause.)*

**Mr. Adrian:**

Miss Benenson, I couldn't disagree with you more completely. I do not think American women should accept the new fashion which is the sloping shoulder, the corseted waist, the padded hip and the very bulky, long skirt for daytime wear. This is the silhouette from France which has been introduced as the news of the moment. This is the fashion that American women are rebelling against and it is the fashion that I think is completely unbecoming and extremely impractical in the daytime for most women.

In my whole argument I speak entirely of daytime wear.

Women have fought in recent years to have bodily freedom, to be released from all hampering eccentricities—skirts that were too long, corsets, bustles, hoop skirts, hobble skirts—all these daytime fashions have disappeared.

Magazines devote pages to health and encourage women to build beautiful bodies, and yet today in this year of 1947, they are suddenly told to wear a corset, that a wasp-waist is divine, that a padded hip is wonderful, and skirts are heading south at a great rate.

Will some one please tell me what it all adds up to? If it is to sell new clothes and make you

throw away your old ones, then I have no use for it. (*Applause.*)

If you will analyze the present French look you will quickly see that in order to attempt to regain their fashion prestige they've had to take a completely opposite stand from the American look on every point. (*Applause.*)

We have shoulder pads; they remove them.

We have a natural waist; they say corset it.

We have slim-looking hips; they say pad them.

We have a trim graceful length skirt; they say bulge it and drop it to the ankles.

And our fashion magazines swallowed it hook, line, and sinker. And so did some of our designers. (*Applause.*)

Paris advocates skirts to the ankle. American women will never accept a fashion that gives them a droopy look, a bulgy look, a fat look, and very few women over thirty can cope with this look even if the fashion is stamped "Paris" in 18-kt. gold. (*Applause.*) This silhouette was created purely and simply to counteract the independence of American fashion thinking, and it's not good enough to do it.

The American women never looked better, as a whole, than she did during the war when we designed clothes which suited her life. She had an uncluttered look and she was given stimulating new

things. It seems a pity to me that we American designers with no yardage limitation or restriction to cope with, should feel the need now of rushing to copy and adapt the first ridiculous brain wave that reaches our shores. (*Applause.*)

Most designers lengthened the skirts to a very graceful length immediately after the L-85 war restrictions were lifted. I think that they never need be longer than they are at the moment. The middle of the calf is long enough, and some can be a bit shorter. (*Applause.*)

In the evening, I think women can always go "all-out" for whatever they like, whether it be bustles, crinolines, ankle length evening clothes, or trains.

Let's take a bird's-eye view—a very quick one—of the fashion impulse in this country since it began. When first people landed here they were too busy building log cabins and finding food to worry very much about new fashions. As their towns grew and they gained more security, they also had more time to find out what their friends in England and Europe were wearing.

France dictated most of the fashions then, and for many years continued to do so magnificently. As our country became a wealthy country, we continued to ask, "What are they wearing abroad?" Fashion magazines came into being and told us.



It was not really until the motion picture was born and developed a long time that the hold of France on the fashion world was slightly torn loose. The motion picture did not do fashionable clothes; they were always at odds with fashion magazines. They could not give too much attention to what was being worn at the moment, because their pictures came out many months later and the heroine could not be dressed in something that would probably be out of fashion by the time it was seen a half year later. So fashions were designed just for the screen and an American "type" was born which had no relation to the so-called "chic mode."

This American type reached the world. It even reached the fashion magazines and, in spite of them as well as because of them, the American look was born.

Now, we'll jump to the last war. We were cut off from what had been a past fashion source and were forced to show our hand. American designers came through magnificently. They did a wonderful job with every kind of fashion handicap — difficulty in getting materials, restrictions, and everything else possible. The war ended. Off to Paris went the little boats, and on them went the editors of magazines, designers, and buyers, to see what was to be seen. Back they all came with a discouraging picture of bulky

clothes made, the French designers said, to anger the Germans. (*Laughter.*)

That we understood and felt sorry about and were sympathetic

But when suddenly, months later, someone had a brainstorm and a nostalgia for a silhouette completely unsuited to our present living, we were gradually not only flooded with pictures of these ungainly creations but were encouraged to look like them.

Why is it necessary to look like a French woman to be chic? Once it was the only way to look. Now it is only one way to look and not a must. What Paris says is only important if Paris says something important, but when Paris sends us a ridiculous silhouette, must we be foolish enough to accept it?

I do not like the extremely exaggerated padded shoulder that has evolved from the shoulder used. I know I am responsible for a great deal of it. But when people began to feel that if a little was good a lot was better, I felt it was time to stop.

The shoulders I sponsor today are trim and square but not exaggerated but they do have padding simply because most women are not lucky enough to have perfect figures. They need some help. A slightly padded shoulder makes their waists slender and their hips balance if they have too much, and too many women have too much. (*Laughter.*)



If you lengthen the skirts to your ankle, you'll look new all right but you'd better get a Stanley Steamer to go with it and put your husband in a 3-inch starched collar. It's all equally quaint and just as uncomfortable.

We're living in a day and age that is so active that it is constantly more complicated. Try to picture one of our gals driving a car with a long skirt caught in the clutch.

Any fashion which hinders us or makes us uncomfortable or causes men and women to rebel against it is unnecessary. The evolution of fashion does not always make sense but, thank heavens, we can still choose what we like.

Our job as designers is to suggest. In the past, women had to follow fashion dictates like lambs led to slaughter. Be glad today that you have freedom of choice, see that you keep it, and don't be bullied. (*Applause.*)

#### **Moderator Denny:**

Thank you, Adrian. Now may we hear from the fashion editor, Lois Long, who reports the trends in fashions from a lady from the *New Yorker*, which is read from coast to coast. Miss Lois Long. (*Applause.*)

#### **Miss Long:**

I can't understand, Mr. Adrian why you, of all people, are in such a panic. You scream about a re-

turn to the Stanley Steamer like one possessed. But like most of the critics of the changing fashion today, you apparently haven't seen the new fashion. You're so upset by the freakish stuff in the papers that you haven't had time to notice that American women are already wearing a smaller waistline which makes the hips and bosom look more rounded without any corset or padding necessary whatsoever.

They have skirts that swing out easily to mid-calf for daytime, and natural shoulders, padded a bit when padding is needed.

Like everyone else, you were so upset and irritated by the strange and wild exaggerations that you haven't noticed that the new lines are already here. The extremes of fashion naturally attract most of the attention.

It is also very natural that extremes should exist at this time. OPA had our women in an oblong box as far as silhouette was concerned. Once these laws were relaxed, liberty became license and everyone went haywire.

Everybody knew that American women were restless and ready for a change. What they didn't know was which way the cat would jump. So they tried a bit of everything.

Now you've all seen college shop fashions stalking down the street — low-heeled shoes, full, clumsy skirt flapping around the

ankles — but since when have school girls been fashion leaders?

Then there is Paris, fighting to gain back her old prestige as fashion dictator of the world, which she was until the last war. Some of the atrocities she is showing in her efforts to recapture the American market indicate that she is in a greater panic than anybody.

Formerly our designers and manufacturers were content to adapt and to modify the ideas of Paris. During the war we developed creative talent of our own because we had to. More important, we developed confidence in ourselves and in our tastes. Paris cannot dictate to us now, Mr. Adrian, and I think she knows it. That's why she's acting so ugly occasionally. She must compete on even terms with us, which is the way it should be.

As for your claim that fashion magazines are aiding and abetting Paris in their attempts to cram bad fashions down our throats—and some of the fashions are so bad that I can hardly believe it myself — fashion magazines are not interested in whether a fashion is good or bad. They are interested in fashion news, and as in other types of news, the eccentric gets the headlines.

There are many violent shrieks that the new fashions won't do for the American woman because she's athletic. Women athletes don't

wear Adrian suits on a tennis court. They don't put on a black crepe dress by Miss Benenson to go swimming. Active sports have their own requirements and their own rules for dress. So does the strictly tailored suit which is one kind of a uniform I think women will never relinquish.

But in other fields, I can't understand criticism that the new fashions are terrible for American women who work in offices or lead an active life. The new fashions are far less confining for this purpose than the ones we have had before. Easy skirts and easy shoulders make easy movement for busy women.

There has been much to-diddle also about what Mr. Adrian calls "the American look." By this he apparently means broad, padded shoulders with a narrow line down the hip. My experience is that most women, American or not, aren't built that way, if anyone insists on bringing nature into account. To get a narrow hip look most of the women I know have to compress themselves into a girdle, which pushes a heavy roll up around the waistline. Very attractive! But Adrian here who tried to compress hips in the fashion is alarmed about a small pinching at the waist—usually a little thing with no bones about it at all. I like it.

All fashion emphasizes some

portion of the body, I like the shift towards the small waistline.

We can't compete with men where brawny shoulders and narrow hips are concerned. Why not victimize them instead by emphasizing the things that we do have—waistline, bosom, and hips?

As for the accusation that designers and manufacturers are trying to put over new fashions solely so that women will throw everything away in their closets, this is a lunatic charge. I have a dress Miss Benenson made for me over two years ago. It has natural shoulders, nipped waist, a longish flaring jacket, and a bell skirt. When the tailor around the corner has a moment, he will put a two-inch fold around the hemline, and I'll continue to have a "new" look in it for another three years. Really good fashions do not arrive all of a sudden, or depart all of a sudden, but neither do they remain static. When you want to replace a dress in your wardrobe, you don't want to maintain a status quo. You want a lift.

For these reasons, I say down with unnatural shoulders that give women a neckline like a turtle. Down with girdles that shove you into a fatty roll around the waistline. I am for lower skirt lines, smooth shoulders, and graceful movement in my clothes. In short, I am in favor of women looking less like executives—and more like women. (*Applause.*)

### **Moderator Denny:**

Thank you, Lois Long. Glamorous Miss Constance Bennett, star of screen and radio, has a flare for fashion which has won for her the title of "best-dressed woman" many years. We're grateful to Allied Artists for allowing Miss Bennett to leave her picture, *Smart Woman*, which she's making in Hollywood, to fly to Dallas for this program. Now, may we hear from Constance Bennett, who needless to say is wearing an Adrian gown. (*Applause.*)

### **Miss Bennett:**

To say that I wholeheartedly agree with Adrian is an understatement. To say that I wholeheartedly disagree with Miss Benenson is still a greater understatement. I've come a long way to put in my two cents' worth, so here goes.

Miss Benenson said that people who didn't accept the so-called new silhouette, were people who wanted to live in the past. I say, that if they do accept it, they are living in the past, because it is a fashion of the past and one of the most hideous fashions of the past. (*Applause.*)

The world has progressed—science, education, and industry. I'm sorry we can't say the same thing about some fashion designers. What if airplanes went back to the days of the Wright brothers, medical science to the days of the medicine man, and woman returned



to the days of elbow grease and washboards? It would be pretty gruesome, wouldn't it?

That's exactly the word I think describes the new silhouettes—gruesome. (*Applause.*) We've reached a sad state of affairs when designers don't use their creative ability and go ahead, instead of reverting to the ugliest period of the past.

I, for one, am not going to let a few headline seeking designers, fashion magazines, and store windows intimidate me into wearing what they say is the latest style from Paris. Not on your life.

I hope that the majority of American women will be loyal to America and some of the truly fine designers we have over here, and not be ballyhooed into accepting the dowdy silhouettes that Paris is trying to foist on us. (*Applause.*)

I think it's about time that some of our fashion recorders get on the bandwagon and play an American tune as loudly and as well as they play some of the French ones. They played fine American fashion tunes during the war. Let's hope that now that the war is over we are not pushed back into a secondary place just because some people think that it's chic to accept anything from Paris. (*Applause.*)

Miss Long said that fashion magazines were instruments used to suggest styles. At the rate they're ballyhooing that so-called "new"

look from Paris, I think they're doing more than suggest—I think they're dictating. I go along with Miss Benenson in her belief that every woman wants to be as alluring as possible, but I challenge her thinking when she states that this new silhouette will win out because it is fresh and exciting. I believe that any style must be helpful to the woman wearing it. I can't see where a body shackled by a corset, restricted by a hobble skirt, or a skirt too long for freedom of motion, topped by drooping shoulders, does anything except encourage dowdiness. And there's nothing exciting about dowdiness. (*Applause.*)

Miss Benenson, in summing up her statement asks us whether the slender shoulders look old, whether the long, full skirts look old. The question has never been one of age, but of beauty and symmetry of line. It's too bad that short skirts were abused by some who wore them too short, but that's no reason for us to go to the other extreme and practically cover up the ankle bone.

Adrian pointed out, and I agree with him, a street skirt is more graceful when it comes to about the middle of your calf or even a little shorter. Miss Long apparently agrees with us, in spite of the fact that she claims to be on the other side of the fence about the points in question. (*Applause.*)

Nowhere in the world will you

find women more beautiful than in America. Nowhere in the world will you find women with the innate knack for wearing clothes more than you do in America. Who knows the American woman better than the American designer? He'd never offend femininity by creating such a clumsy silhouette as Paris is now offering us.

Miss Benenson stated that she

thought the new styles were a challenge to our imagination and ingenuity. What imagination? What ingenuity? They're the very same horrors that we, thank heaven, have grown away from. Why go back to them? Why go backward in dress in a forward moving world? That would cancel out all the stride American fashion has made.

## THE SPEAKERS' COLUMN

**LOIS LONG**—Miss Long is fashion editor of the *New Yorker* magazine, and has had a career in both the fields of fashion and writing.

**FIRA BENENSON**—Born in Russia, Miss Benenson is the daughter of Grigory Benenson, the famous Czarist banker. After the revolution, Fira and her mother and father escaped dramatically from Russia, first to Scandinavia, then to England. In 1921, her mother having died, Miss Benenson and her father came to America for a visit. She eventually came to live here.

Interested in refugees, Miss Benenson opened a shop here for Russian needle-workers which was patronized by many smart women. When her own fortune dwindled, she opened a dress shop of her own. Her taste and ability to advise women on the choice of French models soon won her fame, and in 1934 she was "drafted" by Bonwit Teller to head their *salon de couture*. She never designed models, but went to Paris four times a year to select models from the French *couturiers* and to scout fashions for the entire shop.

In 1940, when the need arose for American fashion creators, Fira Benenson set about making her first collection so quietly that the executives of her own store did not know about it until it was complete. Everyone had counted on her good taste, her knowledge of fine workmanship, her innate sense of chic. But no one took for granted what did happen. Her designs were those that any top-flight Paris designer could envy.

Miss Benenson's collection made headline fashion news with the most logical successor to the padded shoulder: the hug shoulder. She is noted as a creator of whimsy via buttons and buckles, and

designed not only these but even the majority of her own fabrics.

**CONSTANCE BENNETT**—The daughter of Richard Bennett of stage fame, Miss Bennett is a member of a well known family of the theater. She was born in New York City in 1905 and received her formal education in several private schools—Miss Chandor's in New York, Mrs. Merrill's in Mamaroneck, and Mme. Balsan's in Paris.

Miss Bennett began her film career in 1924 in *Cytherea*. Since then, with the exception of four years, she has appeared in many pictures and in many stage plays. Miss Bennett is also a producer and is at present filming her own picture, *Smart Woman*.

**GILBERT ADRIAN**—Mr. Adrian was born in Connecticut in 1903. His father had a millinery shop and also drew quite well and his mother painted in oil, so it was not unusual when young Adrian started to draw at the age of three. At the age of 17, he was sent to New York to the Parsons School of Fine and Applied Art. From there he went to a branch of the school in Paris. His studies were interrupted when he was brought back to New York to do the clothes for the *Music Box Revue*, after Irving Berlin saw a dress designed for a friend to wear to the *Grand Prix Ball*.

After two *Music Box Revues*, Mr. Adrian went to California to do dress designing for the Rudolf Valentino pictures. From that he went on to pictures for Cecil DeMille, and finally to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer where he remained for 12 years.

When the war came and Paris fell, Mr. Adrian left the motion picture company and opened his own studio of dress design.

I, for one, am not going to worry about silly fads and so-called revolutionary changes. I am wearing suits that Adrian created two years ago, and I intend to go on wearing them. Good lines are ageless.

I'm going to wear what becomes me most—for daytime, square trim shoulders, skirts to the middle of my calf, a natural waist and hip line.

I believe that all women will be much happier in an accepted fashion that suits her, than in a new fashion that doesn't. (*Applause.*)

Choose what's most becoming to your face, your figure, and your life, and you'll be well-dressed and chic. Don't be finagled into wearing clothes that make you look dowdy, frumpish, and awkward just because some fashion designers, manufacturers, and magazines tell you that this "new" look is what is being worn this season and that you should discard your old wardrobe and spend money that you could use to better advantage elsewhere. (*Applause.*)

**Moderator Denny:**

Thank you, Connie Bennett. Now will all three of you ladies and Adrian join me around the microphone while we have our discussion. Before we let the audience in on this, Miss Benenson, how about a word from you? You've been the object of a few remarks here by Adrian and Miss

Bennett. How about standing up here and scrapping back?

**Miss Benenson:** Well, I'm against Mr. Adrian and Miss Bennett, because they want a statu quo, and I don't like the statu quo. When we can change, we should change. We should wear clothes that are becoming to us. I've never said we shouldn't. I like skirts that are wider. I do a lot of walking, and I like my skirts wider. I don't like them too short because I have ugly knees and I'm sure that many of you have the same thing. That's why I don't agree with Miss Bennett. (*Applause.*)

**Mr. Denny:** Mr. Adrian, have you a comment at this time?

**Mr. Adrian:** No, but I'd like to direct something at Miss Long.

**Miss Long:** What have I done now?

**Mr. Adrian:** She feels I've been tearing my hair about fashions because I haven't seen the new fashions. I know that she has because she's reviewed them in her column, but, as late as last week I can't quite figure out which side of the fence she's on. If Mr. Denny would give me one minute—not even a minute, a half minute—to read a quote from Miss Long in last week's *New Yorker*, I'd like to see if she can tell where she is in this picture.

**Mr. Denny:** Miss Long, will you give him permission to quote?

**Miss Long:** Certainly.



Mr. Denny: You have my permission and Miss Long's.

Mr. Adrian: This is from Miss Long's column. "One menace you may encounter this season is the tight bodice with a widely flaring peplum, either padded or pleated, over a skirt that is full from the waistband down. A concoction like this may be fine for skinny kids but it makes women who have reached some degree of maturity look squat and matronly." (Laughter.)

Miss Long: That's right.

Mr. Adrian: Then she goes on: "Good dressmaking means slimmness over the hips"—well, that's what we're fighting for—"and a jutting peplum requires narrowness below it. You will also, I fear, see some offerings with narrow shoulders, easy-fitting jacket, and a long circular skirt, and intended for daytime wear, mind you. A mannikin who pranced out at one of the showings looked like a pyramid on the loose." Now which side are you on, Miss Long? (Laughter and applause.)

Miss Long: Nobody who cares about fashion at all, and that goes for all of us, likes wild extremes in any way. We're all agreed, I think that mid-calf is a good length for daytime. Miss Benenson and I are both in favor of that, but we like the fuller motion.

As for that piece that he picked up about the jutting peplum, the peplums I mean are those very,

very heavy ones that stick out from the hips and have a lot of fullness below that. There are plenty of peplums that are graceful but indicate a line below.

Mr. Denny: All right. I notice that you've gotten Miss Bennett excited there. Miss Bennett, are you going to step up and say what you did in pantomime just then?

Miss Bennett: Yes, Miss Long said that apparently we hadn't seen the fashions. The very fashion that she spoke of as disliking, that thick, heavy peplum, is the fashion that is trying to be foisted on us, because I saw the Christian Dior collection and it is horrible. (Applause and cries of No.)

Miss Benenson: I don't understand why you're so excited about the French fashions. Nobody is making you wear them. We are American designers and we are making American fashions.

Miss Bennett: I wish you would make American fashions and not adapt the horrible French fashions that are being foisted on us. (Applause.)

Miss Benenson: Mr. Adrian has adapted fashions in his line—Chinese influence, Indian influence. We all take what we can get the best from this world. To get the atomic bombs, we even took German scientists to come over here. Why not take what there is best and what you like best in the world? The world is ours—it's one world. Everybody

preaches it to us. If the French do something good, I want the French style. If Americans do good, I want American style.

**Mr. Denny:** All right. Thank you, Miss Benenson. Now, Mr. Adrian was right at her shoulder there. (*Applause.*)

**Mr. Adrian:** I agree if the French do something good, we've always been very gracious about it. We've never gotten angry about anything until they did something bad. This is something bad and they ought to take it on the chin. (*Applause.*) The thing that I'd just like to ask is—I saw something that is more frightening than anything we've discussed so far. On the cover of a *Woman's Wear* magazine, which is a daily fashion paper in New York, I saw this. Now you try to visualize this as I talk about it. It's very simple and is well titled. This is a new French fashion which is appearing called the "Bee Hive." (*Laughter.*)

Now if you will imagine a bee hive. There was a woman's head on the top of the bee hive and two feet coming out at the bottom. (*Laughter.*) This was exactly what the picture looked like. It is what we are supposed to adapt and make practical. Now why do we have to take ugly fashions and make them so we can wear them. Why don't we just start out with good ones? (*Applause.*)

**Miss Long:** I agree that atrocities

are atrocities and we shouldn't accept them at all. Well-dressed people never accept them. Now will they accept very extreme things. But Paris hasn't complete monopoly on some of these horrible styles. There are some very bad ones coming from us, too. We have to watch them all.

**Mr. Denny:** For the sake of clarity, Miss Benenson, suppose you tell us what it is about these new styles that you do like, as opposed to what you don't like.

**Miss Benenson:** I like the new shoulder; I don't like too heavy padding. I like the wider skirts—around thirteen inches off the floor. I like the small waistline. (*Applause.*)

**Mr. Denny:** All right. I was going to ask Mr. Adrian the same question. Is there anything about the Paris styles that you like?

**Mr. Adrian:** Well, I haven't seen very much in the Paris fashions that I'd like because the ones shown in the magazines have been very, very ugly, and I think that is the reason not only I have been rebellious about it, but so have 90 per cent of the women of we wouldn't be here tonight.

**Mr. Denny:** All right. Now some of these women out in the audience want to ask you questions, and while we get ready for this period, I'm sure that our listeners will be interested in the following message.

**Announcer:** Yes, friends, you

are listening to the Nation's most popular radio forum, America's Town Meeting of the Air, originating in McFarlin Memorial Auditorium in Dallas, Texas, where we are the guests of a special host committee and Station WFAA. We are discussing the question, "Should We Follow the New Fashions for Women?"

We are about to begin our question period when Fira Benenson, Adrian, Lois Long, and Constance Bennett, will answer questions put to them by this representative audience. Many of you are listening tonight in groups in New York, Hollywood, Seattle, Denver, Chicago, Atlanta, and in smaller towns and cities throughout the country.

At the close of our program, you will carry on your own discussions in this exciting, and very important questions. Why not make it a habit and have your own

Town Meeting discussion group in your home, club, school, or church every Tuesday night. Remember, Tuesday night is Town Meeting night.

For your convenience, copies of tonight's broadcast, including the questions and answers to follow, will be printed in our Town Meeting Bulletin, which you may secure by sending 10 cents to Town Hall, New York 18, New York, to cover the cost of printing and mailing.

We are also very happy to announce that in tomorrow's issue of the nationally circulated *New York Herald Tribune* you will find a four-column summary of tonight's Town Meeting, including the questions and answers to follow. The *Herald Tribune* does this each week as a public service to a better informed America. And now, for our question period, we return you to Mr. Denny.

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## QUESTIONS, PLEASE!

*Mr. Denny:* The person who wins tonight's *Encyclopedia Americana* will have to ask a very good question, for our local committee of judges will award this set to the question it considers best for bringing out facts and broadening the scope of this discussion. The winner will be announced on next week's Town Meeting at this point in the program.

Last week, when we discussed high prices, the winning question was, "As an industrialist, aren't

you afraid that since high prices usually mean high profits, that lower prices will mean lower profits for you?" The question was asked by G. G. Eisenhower of Albuquerque.

Now, we begin with the lady over here, with the purple hat.

*Lady:* With the continued shortage of clothes prevailing in Europe, should we use so much more material to provide new wardrobes for ourselves now?

*Miss Long:* That is a very awk-



ward question. I, very frankly, don't know how to answer it.

*Mr. Denny:* All right, thank you. You just don't know how to answer it, and that's that. A very frank and honest way to put it. Anyone else like to handle that question? Any of you other speakers up here on the platform? No, nobody wants to jump up and take that hot one. Miss Benenson? Oh, very good, fine.

*Miss Benenson:* Mr. Adrian says he wants the status quo only for the daytime. For the evening, he allows as much material as can be used. Therefore, there is no quarrel between us on materials. Now, if your clothes are to be discarded, send them to Europe, don't put them in moth balls.

*Mr. Denny:* I'm afraid we haven't quite answered the lady's question though, Miss Benenson, as to whether we should go ahead with these new styles, which take so much more material, when that material may be needed to spread around the world, as I understand the implication of her question.

Miss Long says, "if we were sure it would be."

Well, it looks like we're not going to get a direct answer to that question, so we will consider that all four of the speakers have dodged it, and let's have another question. The young lady right here on the aisle.

*Lady:* I would like to state my question to Miss Long.

*Mr. Denny:* Well, you held up two fingers indicating a question for Adrian. Now, is your question for Miss Long or Adrian?

*Lady:* For Miss Long.

*Mr. Denny:* Well, I'll take one for Adrian, who has one for Adrian? I have just had one for Miss Long. All right, the lady over here. Now, please hold up the right number of fingers for the person to whom your question is directed—one finger for the first speaker, two for the second, three for the third, and four for the fourth.

*Lady:* Don't you think, that by making a national issue of merely changing styles in women's clothes, we must look silly to other countries?

*Mr. Adrian:* I think we probably do, but that isn't the point. The thing is that the national issue is here, which I didn't raise. It was raised by all you ladies, so I just came here to help you along. *(Laughter and applause.)*

*Mr. Denny:* Where's that man over there on the aisle who had a question?

*Man:* Miss Benenson, do you not feel that the change in fashion is the first overt expression of a change in social philosophy of the people of this country and of the world—a desire to return to a more normal, a more moral, a more socially acceptable, and a more conventional way of living, that has

made this country great and famous through the years? (*Applause.*)

*Mr. Denny:* Sounds like a lawyer. We're going to give that gentleman a chance to make it a little clearer. He can probably tell me that I have misunderstood it. If I understand his question, he thinks that the new styles are more moral, more mature, more American, than they have been before. Is that right?

*Man:* More this: I believe that the change, or the desire for change, is the desire to change not only in fashion, but in everything else, and fashion is the first manifestation of that change, or that desire to change to something more sensible.

*Miss Benenson:* I agree with you completely. (*Laughter.*) The women want to look like women, and not like military men, today.

*Mr. Denny:* Adrian, have you anything to say to that? Miss Bennett?

*Miss Bennett:* Well, I don't see anything the matter with the morals, or anything else about America that the fashions should be the first start to want to change anything in America. (*Applause.*)

*Mr. Denny:* All right, the lady there.

*Lady:* I'd like to ask Miss Bennett this question: Ninety per cent of the women in this audience and all over the country have large hips. What's wrong with a style

that makes large hips less objectionable?

*Miss Bennett:* Nothing is wrong with a style that makes large hips less objectionable. I don't think the padded hips do, do you? (*Laughter and applause.*)

*Miss Long:* Miss Bennett has twisted a great many things in the course of this evening. One is that nothing makes big hips look smaller better than the princess line through the waist—no belt and an easy curving line through the waist and out over the hips. The best of the new fashions—the most of the new fashions have exactly that line—smallness of the waistline and an easy line following out and out to a full hem.

*Mr. Denny:* Thank you, Mr. Adrian, do you have a comment?

*Mr. Adrian:* I think if women want to wear this new fashion and have their hips look as large as possible, they should be allowed to do it, but I don't think that they should try to stop women who don't want their hips as large as possible to wear it. (*Applause.*)

*Mr. Denny:* Thank you. Take the lady right here with the pink flowers in her hat.

*Lady:* Miss Benenson, why not accept this fashion in our own way—lengthening skirts by lowering hems, using bands, yokes, wide belts, and altering sleeves and necks in clever ways? (*Applause.*)

*Miss Benenson:* Well, I agree with you. I advocate it all the

time, but you know, what surprises me is that when I came to Dallas I was told that it was the hotbed of the rebels against the new fashion. I have seen more women in the streets of Dallas with longer skirts than I have even seen in New York. (*Applause.*)

*Mr. Denny:* The gentleman in the balcony.

*Man:* My question is directed to Adrian. Has anyone in American manufacturing—clothing manufacturing—ever approached you and tried to push the idea of your designing clothes with added material?

*Mr. Denny:* Mr. Adrian, has anybody—any American designer ever approached you with the idea of pushing this idea by getting you to add more material to your garments?

*Mr. Adrian:* As a matter of fact, I was talking to one of the large manufacturers of woollens in New York, just before I came here. I was very curious to find out what the manufacturer felt about this fashion—whether they were losing money on it, or making money, or what it was. They said that they—the manufacturers were very upset—they said that their materials were made to be worn on what we know now as the American look, and that this new bulging look made their materials impossible to be worked with, because it made things so thick they couldn't sell them. They felt they'd have to re-

do their whole looms in order to cope with it. So I don't think that they want it, at least it didn't seem that way to me. (*Applause.*)

*Mr. Denny:* Thank you. All right, the young gentleman there with the sweater.

*Man:* I'd like to ask Miss Long a question. Are American women dictating fashions or are fashions dictating to the American women?

*Miss Long:* Oh, I think that we are dictating fashions. We have rejected a great deal of them, but Adrian and Miss Bennett are constantly talking about the things that everyone dislikes—the very clumsy, the very fussy things. I don't care for them, Miss Bennett doesn't care for them. Our American women are rejecting them right and left, except the very extreme exhibitionist—the type of people who always wear the wrong thing anyway.

*Mr. Denny:* Thank you. All right, the young lady in the balcony.

*Lady:* To Miss Bennett. Don't you feel that the designers' return to the modes of the lush '90's and '20's is a subconscious yearning for the safety of those eras? (*Laughter.*)

*Mr. Denny:* Oh, boy!

*Miss Bennett:* No, I really don't think that that's their reason. I think that their reason is in order to make, or try to make women buy new clothes, because we've



been doing with what we've had for so long. (*Applause.*)

*Lady:* My question is to Miss Bennett, or Mr. Adrian.

*Mr. Denny:* Mr. Adrian?

*Lady:* Now that there is so much controversy about the hem length, don't you think this is a logical time for the American women to adopt their *own* daytime, after-five, and evening lengths, that are most becoming to them?

*Mr. Adrian:* I think we have said just about that.

*Mr. Denny:* Yes, that's been covered. Please be careful to ask new questions. All right, the lady on the aisle here.

*Lady:* I'd like to ask Miss Benenson when three out of four American women dislike the new look, then who has the authority to say they are here to stay?

*Miss Benenson:* If they dislike them, they won't wear them. That's all I can tell you. Nobody can force the American women to wear anything they don't want, and don't think that magazines or fashion editors or designers are forcing American women to wear the new clothes. The American women are choosing them themselves, and only from what I see and notice, I can say that the new fashions are here.

*Mr. Denny:* Thank you. There seems to be a difference of opinion on statistics as to how many people are wearing them. The young lady who asked the question said three

out of four women didn't want them. Miss Benenson says they are taking them, Mr. Adrian says they are not, Miss Long says they are. So you pays your money and you takes your choice. But let's go on here, with a question down on the aisle.

*Lady:* My question is to Miss Long. Have any designers of today recognized the need of materials to clothe the children of Europe? If so, how have they promoted the idea?

*Miss Long:* I'm afraid I got that very difficult one before. Of course, it's like almost everything else in a complicated economy. If we could be sure that extra materials would go to Europe, I'm sure that nine women out of ten wouldn't hesitate for a second to live in sackcloth if necessary. But we can't be sure. All we know is what we are being offered and what is apparently plentiful.

*Mr. Denny:* Thank you. Now the lady on the aisle over here, in the black hat.

*Lady:* I would like to ask Miss Benenson for her suggestions on how the woman who is fair, fat, and forty can acquire the new look? (*Laughter.*)

*Miss Benenson:* Well, put a belt on your clothes and pull in your waistline. Make your dress a little longer by letting out the hemline. Take the bulky pads out of your shoulders. If you need pads, put very tiny ones in, and I think

by that you will acquire a new look. (*Applause.*)

*Mr. Denny:* Thank you. The gentleman over here on the aisle.

*Man:* I want to address my question to Mr. Adrian. Why should we consider his American look the acme of fashion revolution? (*Applause.*)

*Mr. Denny:* Well, that sounds like a dirty dig. But—

*Mr. Adrian:* I didn't know you did. (*Laughter and applause.*)

*Mr. Denny:* All right. Mr. Adrian, we'll see what we can get over here. This lady has a question for you.

*Lady:* Since it would permit the use of good garments which we already possess, wouldn't a compromise on medium-length skirts be a wise solution?

*Mr. Adrian:* Well, that's what this is all about. Why say that the compromise is the middle of the calf and it shouldn't go any longer? That's somewhere between the knee and the ankle. (*Laughter.*)

*Mr. Denny:* All right. The young lady here.

*Lady:* I'd like to address a question to Miss Long. Considering the present inflationary crisis, and repeated appeals from national leaders to curtail buying, is it logical to induce women to buy new wardrobes?

*Miss Long:* I don't think that it's necessary to buy new wardrobes. I'm terribly against that

myself. But the fact still remains your clothes do wear out. When you need to replace them, why not get something that's new, and sparkling, and fun, and gay? Clothes don't go out of fashion all of a sudden if they're good clothes. A good tailored suit is never out of fashion.

*Mr. Denny:* Thank you. I see my old friend Tim Healey down there in the audience. Tim, have you got a question for one of these speakers?

*Mr. Healy:* I've got a very good question, Mr. Denny. I'd like to ask Miss Benenson. Why do the best-dressed women in the world—the American women—have to take fashion designs from any other country? (*Applause.*)

*Miss Benenson:* Today, the best-dressed women what you call—and I find that all the American women are very well dressed; they look much better than in any other country—they don't adapt and they don't take foreign fashions. They buy their clothes in America and they have to choose from different designers—those that believe in big pads and short narrow skirts, and they buy from those that believe in the natural look.

*Mr. Denny:* All right. Thank you, Miss Beneson. Now while our speakers prepare their summaries on tonight's question, here's a special message of interest to you.



*Announcer:* Many of you are listening to Town Meeting for the first time tonight. We want to extend you a very special welcome and hope you'll join us in future Town Meetings on the wide variety of subjects we discuss during the course of a year. Many of you will ask the question "How is Town Meeting supported?"

Like all radio, it's supported directly or indirectly by advertising. A few months ago America's Town Meeting of the Air switched to a plan of co-operative sponsorship which enables it to be sponsored locally in all of the 225 cities where it's heard over the affiliated stations of the American Broadcasting Company.

Next week and all during October, we'll be welcoming new sponsors to the Town Hall family, local sponsors who believe firmly in the Town Meeting way of dealing with controversial questions.

While pressure groups seek to weaken and divide America, your Town Meeting asks to attain unity through understanding by presenting both sides in honest discussion in the highest American tradition. Now for the summaries of tonight's discussion, here is Mr. Denny.

*Mr. Denny:* Now let's hear a final summary from Adrian.

*Mr. Adrian:* I don't think we will have any drastic changes in women's daytime fashions for years. There are plenty of exciting new things to do in fashion with-

out pulling out the old 1922 bromides.

The old-fashion theory of dropping skirts to the ground one season and raising them to the knee the next is as dated as the horse and buggy. Today, women are too busy. There are too many working women and too many housewives to be bothered with hindering fashions. Women want to look new and stimulating, but they do not want to look eccentric or dowdy.

We have in this country some of the best designers in the world. France, if she had them, would be proud of them. I beg these American designers to use their good creativeness and make our own fashions for American women today and to be proud of their own ideas. (*Applause.*)

*Mr. Denny:* Thank you, Adrian. Now Miss Fira Benenson, a final word from you, please.

*Miss Benenson:* I believe, Mr. Adrian, that your fight is much more against the magazines and the Paris influence than against the new fashions of today. Fashions are never static. If they are, they're no longer fashions.

This is 1947 and not 1946, and nothing ages a woman more than the fashions of yesterday.

I believe that the clothes of today have charm, grace, and femininity, and don't for a minute believe that anybody can bully the



American woman — not even her husband. She is intelligent enough to choose for herself what she wants to wear and I do hope, Mr. Adrian, that before long you will agree with us, and you will start designing your magnificent clothes for the woman of today. (*Applause.*)

Mr. Denny: Thank you, Fira Benenson, Adrian, Lois Long, and Constance Bennett. Our thanks also, to Station WFAA and our Town Meeting host committee. Friends, you have heard both sides of this fashion question. What do you, the American people, think? I'm sure that our speakers and the industry will be glad to have your opinion.

If you will sit down and write us and tell us just what you think, we will see that our speakers and the other fashion authorities get

this information directly. Remember, our address is Town Hall, New York 18, New York. If you want a copy of tonight's discussion, enclose 10 cents to cover the cost of printing and mailing.

Next week we move to Kansas City to discuss the most timely topic in the field of international affairs, "On What Basis Can Our Differences with Russia Be Resolved?" Our speakers will be A. A. Berle, Jr., former Assistant Secretary of State; Senator Glen Taylor, Democrat of Idaho. As special interrogators we will hear from Clarence Decker, president of the University of Kansas City and Homer Rainey, president of Stephens College, Columbia, Missouri.

So plan to be with us next week and every week at the sound of the Crier's bell. (*Applause.*)